

## Additional notes on eight bird species from Belize

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Con el fin de contribuir hacia el conocimiento de la avifauna de Belice se presenta información adicional sobre ocho especies: *Phoenicopterus ruber*, *Vermivora celata*, *V. ruficapilla*, *Piranga roseogularis*, *Amaurospiza concolor*, *Sicalis luteola*, *Carduelis psaltria* y *Dactylortyx thoracicus*. Un mapa del país indica las áreas en donde se realizaron los siguientes reportes.

Russell<sup>17</sup> provided the first comprehensive report on the avifauna of Belize. Included was a detailed summary of all ornithological work conducted in Belize since 1845. Subsequently many have contributed new records and/or distributional information to our knowledge and understanding of the country's avifauna<sup>2-5,7-10,12,15,16,18,19</sup>. In addition, Wood *et al.*<sup>20</sup>, Garcia *et al.*<sup>6</sup> and Miller & Miller<sup>13,14</sup> produced checklists which the number of species varied from 533 to 556 to 540 to 549<sup>11</sup>. Jones & Valley<sup>11</sup> recently published what is considered to be the most comprehensive and up-to-date avian checklist for Belize, documenting 566 species. The following is intended to augment the existing documentation.

The findings reported here are based on research conducted in the country since November 1997 by the staff of the Birds Without Borders-*Aves Sin Fronteras*<sup>SM</sup> (BWB-ASF) project. OAF, WM and MT are citizens of Belize, and VDP is the project's international coordinator based in Wisconsin, USA; all have conducted avian research in Belize on behalf of BWB-ASF since November 1997. GA worked for BWB-ASF in 1999–2001, and participated in the research for c.2 months in Belize (February 2000 and March 2001). Intensive nest searching and monitoring, point counts, mist-netting and bird banding, censuses and behavioural and opportunistic observations were used to provide documentation for the following reports.

### Species accounts

#### Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Jones & Valley<sup>11</sup> listed *P. ruber* as occurring in the Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize and Toledo districts but noted only 1–2 records from each. Wood *et al.*<sup>20</sup> and Miller & Miller<sup>14</sup> considered it very rare and as occurring in mangroves and cayes. On 28 March 2001, during a survey flight over Aguacaliente Swamp, Toledo District, GA sighted two adults. GA and OAF observed the birds for a minimum of two minutes as they flew in an east–west direction at c.90 m above sea level. They were identified by their overall size, bright pink colour and black primaries and secondaries. This is the southernmost record in Belize and the first from Toledo District.

#### Singing Quail *Dactylortyx thoracicus*

Jones & Valley<sup>11</sup> listed *D. thoracicus* as a rare permanent resident occurring in Orange Walk and Cayo Districts and on Ambergris Caye. They further noted that it is not well known and can be easily overlooked. During 286 days of field work around Chaa Creek, western Cayo District (17°06'N 89°04'W), in November 1997–February 2002, BWB-ASF researchers observed or heard *D. thoracicus* on 107 (37.4%) days. Based on these observations, it appears that this species is fairly common in this area.

#### Orange-crowned Warbler *Vermivora celata*

On 16 December 2001, an individual of unknown sex was trapped along the south bank of the Sibun River within Runaway Creek Nature Preserve, Belize District (17°21'N 88°29'W; 38 m). The bird was captured in an elevated mist-net that sampled

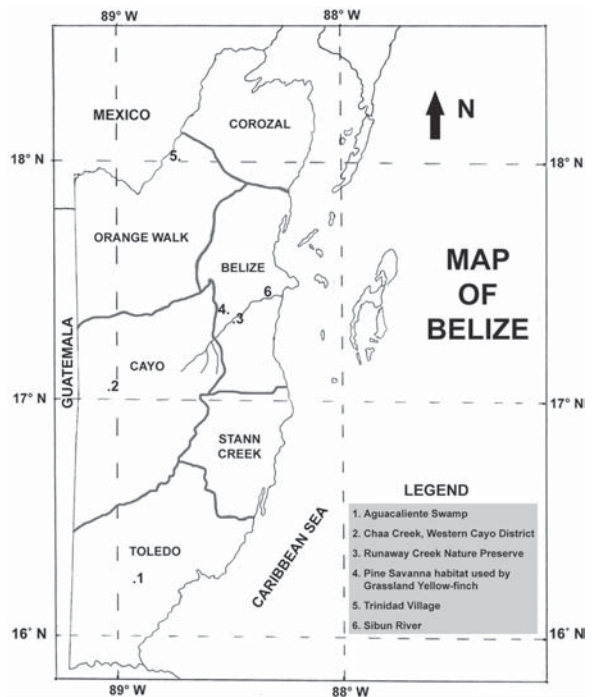


Figure 1. Map of Belize showing the various localities mentioned in the text

vegetation strata 4–6 m in height<sup>1</sup>. It was identified as *V. celata* on size, morphology, yellow undertail-coverts, greyish head, presence of eyeline, indistinct eye-ring and olive upperparts. Contrasting wing-coverts, tapered primary-coverts and tapered rectrices indicated a second-year. This is considered the only credible documentation of *V. celata* in Belize (H. L. Jones pers. comm. 2002).

#### Nashville Warbler *Vermivora ruficapilla*

Jones & Vallely<sup>11</sup> listed *V. ruficapilla* as occurring in Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo and Toledo districts but noted only 1–2 records in each. On 14 January 1999, while conducting point counts in a grapefruit *Citrus paradisi* plantation, in western Cayo District (17°05'N 89°05'W; 118 m) OAF and WM observed two individuals foraging on a dying grapefruit tree at c.07h30.

#### Rose-throated Tanager *Piranga roseogularis*

On 29 January 1998, while conducting point counts, OAF and MT observed an adult male *P. roseogularis* for over ten minutes at 17°06'N 89°05'W (226 m), in western Cayo District. A nasal mewing, very similar to that described by Howell & Webb<sup>8</sup>, was heard during the first few minutes of the observation. Point counts were conducted on 32 days along this transect and additional field work was conducted in the general area on 254 days without further records of *P. roseogularis*. This represents the first record for Cayo District and the southernmost record of the species in the Yucatán Peninsula.

#### Blue Seedeater *Amaurospiza concolor*

Howell *et al.*<sup>7</sup> and Vallely & Aversa<sup>18</sup> provided records of *A. concolor* within Belize District. Jones & Vallely<sup>11</sup> listed it as uncommon there and as being known from only 1–2 records in Orange Walk District. In 2000–2002, OAF and MT banded five individuals at a location (17°21'N 88°29'W, 38 m)



Figure 2. Blue Seedeater *Amaurospiza concolor*, Runaway Creek Nature Preserve, Belize, March 2000 (Gene Albanese)



Figure 3. Lesser Goldfinches *Carduelis psaltria*, foraging near Trinidad village, Belize, December 2001 (Wilver Martinez)

on the south bank of the Sibun River within Runaway Creek Nature Preserve, Belize District. The microhabitat was dominated by spiny bamboo *Guadua longifolia* and transitioned into a secondary broadleaf riverine forest. On 21 March 2000, two were captured in mist-nets and banded. One was a male and the other a female, with unflattened wing chords (uwc) of 61 mm and 58 mm, and weights of 12.9 g and 12.2 g. On 3 March 2001, an individual of unknown sex was banded; it had a uwc of 60 mm and weight of 12.8 g. On 4 March 2001, an adult male was trapped. This individual had a uwc of 63.5 mm and weight of 12.8 g. On 21 January 2002, a female with a uwc of 59 mm and weight of 12.4 g was trapped. All five individuals had completely ossified skulls and only a trace of subcutaneous fat.

#### Grassland Yellow-finch *Sicalis luteola*

Jones & Vallely<sup>11</sup> listed *S. luteola* as an uncommon permanent resident in Orange Walk, Belize, Stann Creek and Toledo Districts. Vallely & Aversa<sup>18</sup> observed 40–50 near San Felipe, Orange Walk District, on 17 January 1994. In 1999, as part of the BWB-ASF project, intensive nest searching and monitoring was conducted in a pine savanna (17°21'N 88°33'W; 46 m) within Belize District. A 200 m<sup>2</sup> nest-searching plot was systematically monitored on 59 days in April–July 1999. *S. luteola* was observed on 21 (35.6%) days, the first on 27 April 1999 and last on 13 July 1999. In addition, three active nests each containing three eggs were located, one in May and two in June, constructed at 0.2 m, 0.3 m and 0.3 m above ground. In 2000, the study site burned and only casual observations were conducted between April and mid-August, during which *S. luteola* was not observed. In 2001, the nest-searching plot was expanded to encompass an area of 395 m<sup>2</sup> and intensive nest searching and monitoring was conducted in April–August. *S. luteola* was not observed in 2001. Based on our research in 1999–2001, it appears that *S. luteola* moved into the area in late April 1999, established breeding territories, nested, and then departed in mid-July 1999. Intensive nest searching and monitoring at nearby Runaway Creek Nature

Preserve in 2000–2001 failed to produce any records of the species. The savanna at this study site varied from open areas with high graminoid density to parts that were at a mature successional stage, with extensive woody vegetation. This habitat was probably not suitable for nesting of *S. luteola*.

#### Lesser Goldfinch *Carduelis psaltria*

Jones & Valley<sup>11</sup> listed this species as an uncommon permanent resident in Orange Walk District and not occurring elsewhere in Belize. Jones *et al.*<sup>9</sup> also commented that recent records from north-eastern Orange Walk District may indicate the establishment of a small resident population. On 30 December 2001, WM flushed a female *C. psaltria* from an active nest. The nest contained three eggs and an adult male was observed nearby. The nest was constructed on a Sour Orange *Citrus quarantium* tree (18°01'N 88°41'W; 49 m) in the village of Trinidad, Orange Walk District. The nest was located 18 cm from the main stem and 1.68 m above ground level. This represents the first nesting record of *C. psaltria* in Belize and confirms the establishment of a local population.

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